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SUBJECT: OAS OBSERVER MISSION AND ELECTORAL AUTHORITIES
CONFIDENT THAT BALLOTING WILL BE FREE, FAIR AND SECURE

SUMMARY

1. (U) The heads of the National Electoral Board (JNE) and the Office of National Electoral Processes (ONPE) told Polcouns 4/6 that they were confident the 4/9 general elections will proceed in a free, fair and secure manner. OAS Observer Mission director Lloyd Axworthy concurred with this assessment. Electoral materials have been distributed nationwide, citizens drafted to man voting tables have been trained, software to transmit vote counts from polling locations to ONPE headquarters has been tested, over 147,000 police and military personnel will be deployed to provide public security, guard polling places, and protect ONPE personnel. ONPE plans to report 30-50 percent of the results by midnight election day, and the OAS Observer Mission (to which the Embassy is contributing 41 volunteers) and the NGO Transparencia will also provide quick counts. While the electoral process is expected to be smooth, the complexity of the ballot itself could result in a large number of spoiled ballots and challenges. END SUMMARY.

ELECTION OFFICIALS POSITIVE

2. (U) JNE President Enrique Mendoza and ONPE Director Magdalena Chu told Polcouns 4/6 that they were confident that the 4/9 general elections would proceed in a free, fair and secure manner. Chu noted that ONPE has distributed sufficient election materials nationwide and overseas to serve Peru's 16,494,906 registered voters (457,891 in the exterior); carried out training for citizens who have been drafted to man the 85,971 voting tables in country (another 2510 tables are managed by Peruvian Consulates in the exterior); will have sufficient officials at voting centers to guide voting table members who missed their training sessions; and held successful simulations on 4/2 of the voting process and of the software to be used to transmit results from polling centers to ONPE headquarters. Mendoza said that the JNE, which supervises the electoral process and resolves election-related legal challenges and issues, is satisfied with ONPE's preparations.

3. (U) OAS Observer Mission director Lloyd Axworthy (Canada) concurred with these assessments in a 4/6 discussion

with Polcouns. While acknowledging that there had been tensions between the JNE and ONPE, Axworthy thought that these had been resolved and foresaw a relatively smooth electoral process. In prior comments to the press, Axworthy stated that he expected the voting to be "complicated" due to the large number of parties and candidates competing (20 running for President, while up to 24 parties/alliances are presenting congressional lists in each of Peru's 25 electoral districts), but completely discounted the possibility of significant fraud and expressed his assurance that the process will be fully transparent.

POLICE AND MILITARY OUT IN FORCE

¶4. (U) Gen. Jose Williams Zapata, Head of the Armed Forces Joint Command, and Gen. Luis Vizcarra, Director of Operations of the Peruvian National Police (PNP), held a joint press conference on 4/5 to explain the GOP's security measures on election day and provide a demonstration of their organizations' cooperation. They announced that over 147,000 military and police personnel will be deployed on election day to guarantee public security, guard and maintain order in polling centers, and protect ONPE personnel as they collect and transport vote tally sheets to ONPE headquarters in Lima.

ONPE Director Chu told Polcouns on 3/19 that she was very pleased with the cooperation her organization was receiving from the security forces, noting that both the Armed Forces and the PNP stationed liaison officers at ONPE over a month before the election to facilitate coordination.

REPORTING ELECTION RESULTS

¶5. (U) Chu originally announced that she expected ONPE would be able to report 50 percent of the results in the presidential race by midnight 4/9, although lately she has cautioned that the actual total may be in the neighborhood of 30 percent. Eighty percent of the votes should be counted within 2-3 days, she said, with resolution of the remaining 20 percent depending upon how long it takes vote tally sheets to arrive in Lima from distant rural and jungle regions (a week or more in the case of areas that can only be reached by boat or on foot) and on the resolution of challenges to disputed ballots by the JNE.

¶6. (U) The Organic Law of Elections provides that vote projections can be published by the media and NGOs only after ONPE divulges its quick count results, or after 22:00 on election day, whichever comes first. The OAS Observer Mission, to which the Embassy is contributing 41 officers/spouses as volunteers (14 in the interior, 27 in Lima) plans to announce its quick count results, as does the pro-democracy NGO Transparencia. Local pollsters and media companies are also expected to conduct their own exit polling.

POSSIBLE PROBLEM AREAS

¶7. (SBU) Public security in isolated rural areas, particularly where the Sendero Luminoso (SL) terrorist organization is active, and voter confusion over the complexity of the ballot are the two chief concerns as election day nears. The massive deployment of military and PNP forces is designed to ensure public security, but some issues remain. Percy Medina, Secretary General of Transparencia (which has placed observers nationwide), told Polcouns that he is worried about rumors his NGO has received that activists loyal to ultra-nationalist "outsider" candidate Ollanta Humala, perhaps in collusion with local mid-level military commanders, may attempt to pressure voters or stuff ballot boxes. There are also reports that SL columns have warned rural communities not/not to vote and in some cases taken residents' identification documents, which

would prevent them from receiving voting materials.

¶8. (U) The complexity of the ballot itself could have a substantial effect on the election's outcome, a concern noted publicly by OAS Observer Mission director Axworthy. The ballot is divided into three sections, covering the presidential, congressional, and Andean Parliament races respectively. The section on the presidential race contains two vertical columns, listing the name of the party/alliance, its symbol, and the photo of its candidate. The sections on the congressional and Andean Parliament races each contain four vertical columns, listing the name of the party/alliance, its symbol, and two blank boxes for casting "preferential votes." Voters are supposed to register their votes by placing an "X" through the symbol of the party they wish to vote for in each separate electoral race, and they have the option of writing the identification number of up to two candidates they wish to cast preferential votes for in the two blank boxes provided in both the congressional and Andean Parliament sections. (Note: Parties win congressional and Andean Parliament seats in proportion to the votes they receive in each electoral district -- 25 electoral districts in the legislative race, one national electoral district for the Andean Parliament -- with the candidates from the winning parties that obtain the most preferential votes occupying the seats. End Note).

¶9. (SBU) The NGO Transparencia carried out a voting simulation at USAID two weeks ago, in which the latter's Peruvian employees participated. These employees have a much higher level of education than the average Peruvian, but nonetheless their confusion over the ballot resulted in 25 percent of the completed ballots containing serious faults (wrong boxes checked, boxes circled, etc...) that could lead them to be challenged or disqualified. Transparencia Secretary General Medina commented that this result matched

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similar simulations his NGO carried out in marginal areas of the capital. ONPE Director Chu, in her 3/19 meeting with

Polcouns, noted that her organization's public education efforts have fallen far short of previous outreach programs in the past due to budget cuts: whereas ONPE received 277 million Soles for the 2001 election, it would only receive 205-210 million Soles for the 2006 process.

COMMENT

¶10. (SBU) There is every indication that the electoral process will on the whole be free, fair, transparent and secure. Problems, if they arise, will probably be related to the counting of votes, given the complexity of the ballots, and to the very real possibility that the respective quick counts and exit polls may provide widely divergent results. As the presidential race is a hotly contested three-way battle, we can expect the odd-candidate-out and his/her supporters to challenge the admission/exclusion of imperfectly marked ballots and the fairness of quick counts and exit polls that rely on an incomplete percentage or a small sampling of the national vote. END COMMENT.

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